

## Confirmation of Buff-fronted Owl *Aegolius harrisii* for the Cordillera Oriental of Colombia

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Buff-fronted Owl *Aegolius harrisii* is rare and poorly known. Records come from a variety of habitats and altitudes in Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay and Argentina (Parker *et al.* 1985, Hilty & Brown 1986, Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990, Studer & Teixeira 1994, König *et al.* 1999). Few specimens are available and the species has been recorded at comparatively few localities.

For Colombia, Buff-fronted Owl has been reported only from 'Bogotá' trade skins from the 19th century (Meyer de Schauensee 1949), from five specimens taken in 1939–72 by Kjell von Sneidern at 1,560–1,860 m, at El Tambo, dpto. Cauca, on the lower slope of the Western Andes, below Cerro Munchique (02°32'N, 76°57'W), and at Llorente, dpto. Nariño, southern Colombia (00°49'N, 77°15'W) (von Sneidern 1954, Fitzpatrick & Willard 1982, Instituto de Ciencias Naturales–Museo de Historia Natural, Bogotá no. 29869). Here we report new distributional information, measurements and weights from four individuals at three localities, two near Bogotá and the third near the Colombian–Venezuelan border (Fig. 1). Data were obtained by personnel from the Laboratory of Population and Community Ecology, Universidad Javeriana, and during biological inventories on the eastern flank of the Cordillera Oriental by personnel from the Instituto Alexander von Humboldt, Bogotá. Birds captured with mist-nets were measured with dial callipers or a millimetre rule (wing chord and tail length), and weighed using an electronic or spring balance. The following records confirm the species' presence in the Cordillera Oriental.

Sites where owls were mist-netted or collected near Bogotá are c.15 km west, at Finca San Cayetano, Vereda Fute, municipio Bojacá, dpto. Cundinamarca (04°38'N, 74°19'W), where a male and a female were collected (Colección del Laboratorio de Ecología de Poblaciones y Comunidades, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, no. 068, no. 099), and c.20 km north-west of the city, at Finca Miralejos, Vereda Pueblo Viejo, municipio Zipacon, dpto. Cundinamarca (04°46'N, 74°24'W), where a female was mist-netted, banded and released. The region is intensively farmed, with remnant forest patches along the west border of the Sabana de Bogotá, at 2,600–2,900 m. Cloud forest fragments of varying size and degrees of disturbance are interspersed with potato, corn and vegetable crops, and dairy cattle pastures. The forest at San Cayetano is part of a larger tract that continues from south-west of Bogotá for c.50 km north along the ridge of the Bogotá plateau. Forest at the site is fairly undisturbed, on a gentle slope, with large trees averaging 15 m high, and dense undergrowth. At Miralejos there is a mosaic of small-forest fragments within a matrix of pastures. Forest is similar to that at San Cayetano in

height and general structure, although the canopy is discontinuous and there are more signs of recent human and cattle disturbance. Trees and shrubs of the families Asteraceae (*Ageratina* spp., *Erato* spp. and *Eupatorium* spp.), Winteraceae (mostly *Drimis* spp.) and Melastomataceae (*Miconia* spp., *Tibuchina lepidota*, *Bucquetia* spp. and *Clidemia* spp.) are dominant at both sites. Rubiaceae (mostly *Palicourea* spp.), Ericaceae (*Macleania rupestris*) and Melastomataceae (*Miconia* spp.) dominate the understorey, with some Orchidaceae (*Pleurotalis* spp. and *Epidendron* spp.) and Araceae (*Anturium* spp.).

The third site is on the eastern flank of the Cordillera Oriental, in Parque Nacional Natural Tamá, municipio Herrán, dpto. Norte de Santander (07°26'N, 72°27'W), at 2,430 m, within forest with a dense understorey dominated by *Rhipidocladium* plants.

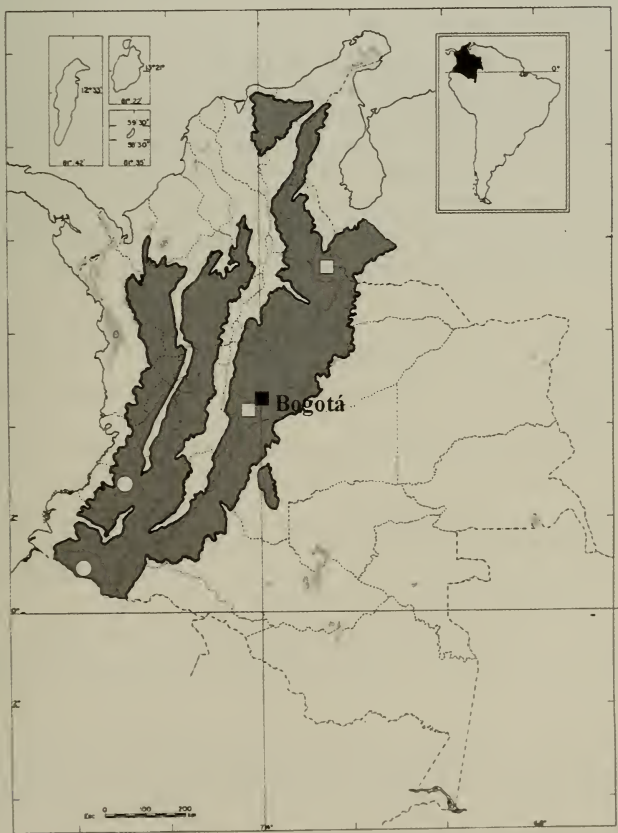


Figure 1. Map with records of Buff-fronted Owl *Aegolius harrisii* in the Andes of Colombia (dark grey shading), showing previous (white circles) and new (white squares) locations.

The two captured at San Cayetano, on 14 October 1998 and 7 December 1998, were possibly a pair and were caught early morning in mist-nets placed within forest. The female captured at Miralejos, on 15 March 1999, was caught at 23.00 h in a mist-net near the forest edge. At both sites mist-nets were placed at ground level. The male specimen collected in Parque Nacional Natural Tamá, on 25 June 1999, was also captured early morning. A headless *Atlapetes* was found in the same mist-net, 50 cm from the owl. This specimen (no. 10636) has been deposited at the Instituto de Investigaciones de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt (Villa de Leyva).

All four birds had the bill dusky with a whitish tip, and the feet yellow-flesh. The iris colour of the males was more greenish yellow and that of the females was yellowish green. Measurements and other data for our birds and a 1972 specimen are presented in Table 1. Some mammal hairs were present in the stomach of one of the females (LEP 099).

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